

Jefferson-Martin Transmission Project

From: Andrew Brenneman [andrewb@pobox.com]
Sent: Wednesday, February 26, 2003 7:17 PM
To: jeffmartin@aspeneq.com
Cc: California Assembly Member Hannah-Beth Jackson; California Assemblymember Gene Mullin; California Assemblymember Joseph Canciamilla; California Assemblymember Keith Richman; California Assemblymember Rick Keene; California Assemblymember Sarah L. Reyes; California Assemblymember Doug La Malfa; California Department of Conservation; California Department of Water Resources; California Division of Land Resource Protection; California Environmental Protection Agency; California Governor's Office of Planning and Research; California Public Utilities Commission; California State Senator Jackie Speier
Subject: Citizen Affidavit: Concerning Application A02-09-043 - Jefferson Martin 230kV Transmission Line Project

California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC)
Scoping Comments
Concerning Application A02-09-043 : Jefferson Martin 230kV Transmission Line Project

Community Member Affidavit

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STATEMENT

The Bay Area is a great place to live. The quality of life is high in many ways. One of the things that make this area of the country so enjoyable is the presence of large tracts of open and protected land in close proximity to our urban centers of San Francisco, San Jose, and Oakland/East Bay. This open land is the legacy of generations of Bay Area citizens who had a vision of protected and open land that was easily accessible, and to that vision they contributed time, money, and enduring dedication.

We are all beneficiaries of that vision and the effort that made that vision manifest. With minimal effort, the East Bay resident can enjoy the trails of the Berkeley Hills, the San Francisco dweller can enjoy the boundless vistas of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and families on the Peninsula can teach their toddler how to walk on the Sawyer Camp trail (as my wife, Karen, and I did) or set off for the trails up on Skyline.

These areas are no mere parks, no narrow "greenways" seen in less fortunate cities. These areas are large enough to support large tracks of land that have never been developed, a spectrum of ecosystems, and a critical mass of land and resources to support larger animals that require the presence of complex and proximate food chains: bobcats, red-tailed hawks, lynx, and even in more remote locations, mountain lions.

The easy access of these open areas has an effect on our perspective. It reminds us on a daily basis how fortunate we are to enjoy this land and important it is to protect. We are both beneficiaries of those who created these open spaces and stewards to its continued protection.

Our family feels fortunate to live in a small community known as San Mateo Highlands, an unincorporated area just north of Rt 280 and just east of Rt 280. We are perched on a hilltop above Crystal Springs. Almost all of us here live in single story Eichler Homes, mostly less than 12 feet tall, that are dwarfed by the trees planted a half century ago by the first residents of the Highlands. We enjoy the sights and sounds of the watershed. We can watch the fog roll in, especially in the fall, cascading down from Skyline like a milky wave. The air coming in from the sea seems palpably fresh. On a clear day, the setting sun can be seen poking through the trees at the top

of skyline, making a play with the shadows of the trees. A good place to catch these sights is from the Recreation Center on Lexington Avenue. Most afternoons a few dozen kids from the Highlands and neighboring communities gather there to enjoy the playground, the air, and each other's company.

We are writing today to express our belief that the Proposed Jefferson-Martin 230kv Transmission Line as described in Application A02-09-043 will have a substantive negative impact on the open space in the Mid-Peninsula and on the safety and quality of life in the San Mateo Highlands and adjacent communities.

The 230kv would be installed on the current route of the 60kv line and would involve the construction of towers that are significantly higher, wider, and more complex than what exists today. A principal concern is a question of scale. The current 60kv is already an unfortunate element of the landscape around Crystal Springs, and a true eyesore from many perspectives. The existing towers however are within the general scale to the features of the landscape. For example, they are perhaps no greater than 50% than the tallest Monterrey Pine in the area. They are clearly visible but don't fit too badly into the overall scale of the land.

On the other hand, the 230kv line would dominate the landscape. They would be an order of magnitude beyond the landscape features. This would cause all existing features such as berms, hills, and trees to be dwarfed by the steel towers. Viewed from the east, even the skyline crest would be diminished, seen through a maze of towers and lines. As seen from 280South, the heart-stopping beauty of Crystal Springs, a vista so unique that it is routinely used as backdrops to feature films such as "The Wedding Planner", would be marred by a phalanx of cables and girders. It would be the first feature of the landscape that would be noticed.

Marring this unique region of open land with such a construction would have tragic consequences. It would represent a failing on our parts as a community and as a state to maintain this land that was created for our benefit. It would represent a failure of stewardship.

The impact on the Highlands would be even more tragic. The single story houses that are nestled in the hills and trees would be dramatically dominated by the towers and cables. Our children would hereafter be forced to play and walk to school beneath the looming towers. Only decades from now will we know what impact the dramatically increased Electric and Magnetic field would have on our health, particularly on the health of our children and elderly. Our hilltop retreat would become a grimmer, and possibly unhealthier, industrial outpost.

In addition to quality of life issues, there would clearly be a direct negative impact on property values in the Highlands and surrounding communities. My (admittedly layperson's) understanding is that there exists a significant amount of data to substantiate and predict the impact on values. If this project were to go forward under the context of eminent domain, for the necessity of the community at large, to the detriment of residents in this community, then it necessary in the spirit of equity for the commonwealth and its utilities to reimburse those residents that were the direct victims of a negative financial impact. This would clearly increase the cost of the overall project.

Careful analysis much take place before such drastic steps as increasing the lines and towers to 230kv. First, we must explore the rationale for the increase at all. We are currently not experiencing the boom in commercial and residential growth that we had a few years ago. Question: do we need this NOW? Also, as a state we have far too little financial resources for even our current public initiatives. We are facing an unprecedented deficit. Question: can we AFFORD this now? If we postpone the project until the need is truly there and there are the financial resources available to support it, then new technologies and techniques may be

developed in the interim so that the line can be increased with less environmental impact. Perhaps new alternatives will emerge.

If it is clearly impossible to postpone the capacity increase, then placing the lines underground as it passes through the Crystal Springs area would seem to be the logical choice. According to the application, a significant northern portion of the line is planned as an underground line. It would therefore seem to be logical to increase the amount to be placed underground, to include other line segments, so as not to mar the Crystal Springs area. The wonderful additional benefit of this plan would be that the existing 60kV line could be buried and no towers would be required at all. We would contribute to the legacy of this open space. The aesthetic benefit of removing these towers, and the stewardship this demonstrates, would help garner support for the project, not only from the Crystal Springs area but from the Bay Area at large.

Today while driving north on 280, around Edgewood, I saw a Great Blue Heron. Later I saw an egret walking across a hill. As a transplanted Easterner, I don't take such sights for granted: few regions of the country can support such magnificent birds in close proximity to major cities. I wondered if the construction of the new towers would scare them away. I wondered if red-tail hawks sit on humming high-power lines just as they sit on lampposts. I wondered how it would look to see the egrets sauntering beneath the giant structures. A painful picture.

For the benefit of the Crystal Springs communities and the Bay Area at large, we urge the necessity of this project to be further assessed so that it is clear to all that the project must be done, and that it must be done now. And, if such an analysis does unequivocally demonstrate that the project cannot be delayed, we urge that the lines be installed underground.

Thank you for your consideration.

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